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The Michigan Department of Education runs a comprehensive program serving the social, physical, occupational, and educational needs of its approximately 90,000 migrants. Described in this paper are materials prepared as a part of the education program for migrant preschoolers, most of whom speak a nonstandard dialect of Spanish. The Oral Language Lessons, the "heart" of this program, provide the teacher who has little background in either linguistics or in teaching English as a foreign language with linguistically controlled activities while at the same time preparing her to develop similar activities of her own. The 59 English and 61 Spanish lessons, each taking approximately 15 minutes, are designed to be used at the rate of about three per day for eight weeks. The non-English speaking children are taught to understand and discuss basic ideas about size, color number, time and space; identify and describe familiar objects and relationships; and ask questions, all in standard English. The Spanish lessons, taught by a Spanish-speaking person, prepare the child for the conceptual content of the English lessons and also help him acquire standard alternatives for certain nonstandard features of his own dialect of Spanish. These lessons correlate with similar materials being produced by the Department which are available at the kindergarten and first grade levels. (AMM)

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A BILINGUAL ORAL LANGUAGE AND CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN[1]

Richard C. Benjamin

Of the approximately 90,000 migrants identified in Michigan last year, about 10% were intrastate and another 10% left the migrant stream at the end of the growing season to make Michigan their home. The great majority, however, came to Michigan from other states in May or June, moved within Michigan every two to four weeks and then returned to their home states in September or October. Most of Michigan's migrants are from Texas and New Mexico, and most have a Spanish-speaking background. There are some migrants from Florida, California and other states, including some blacks and Appalachia whites.

The Michigan Department of Education runs a comprehensive program serving the social, physical, occupational, and educational needs of this population. The materials I will describe are a part of the educational program at the preschool level, which in Michigan means primarily four-year-olds.

Although the older children generally speak a non-standard dialect of English learned from their peers and in school, the preschoolers most often speak a non-standard dialect of Spanish, learned from their parents. There are obviously many serious problems in implementing a meaningful educational program for a highly mobile, non-English-speaking population. The two problems of most relevance at this time are: first, the teachers involved in the program, who usually have experience with disadvantaged youngsters, have little background in either linguistics or in teaching

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English as a foreign language, and second, because of this lack of appropriate preparation, the teacher is more likely to assume that low I.Q. or motivation accounts for student failure rather than assuming that she can and should modify her language teaching techniques until she becomes effective.

For these reasons, the program I will describe gives the teacher detailed and carefully planned oral language lessons that take into account important linguistic considerations. This provides her with linguistically controlled activities, while at the same time preparing her to develop similar activities of her own.

The package we developed should be thought of as an ordered sequence of suggestions to teachers. We have sought to provide the teacher of the preschool Spanish-speaking child with the tools she needs to design a concrete long-range plan of action.

The Oral Language Lessons are the heart of the program. Each lesson takes approximately 15 minutes. There are 59 English lessons and 61 Spanish lessons which should be used at a rate of approximately three per day for eight weeks. If used as suggested they should provide the child with the language and conceptual skills he needs to begin to benefit from a standard school setting where English is the language of instruction. This is the overall goal of the program. Specifically, this means teaching non-English speaking children to understand and discuss basic ideas about size, color, number, time and space, to be able to identify and describe familiar objects and relationships, and to ask questions, all in standard English.

The goal of preparing the child to benefit from a standard school setting is especially evident from the emphasis of the lessons on teaching him to ask questions. Armed with this skill, he can fill in gaps in his own understanding and make any curriculum fit his particular needs and interests.

Since we are dealing with a non-English speaking population, the linguistic target features stressed in the English lessons are selected in accordance with established foreign language teaching principles. New structural patterns are introduced in situations calling for meaningful communication. Within a grammatically controlled framework, new vocabulary is carefully introduced to facilitate the social and cognitive goals of the program. In creating the activities, special care was taken to set up situations which elicit natural language forms. Where a contrastive analysis has indicated potential problems with a particular feature, the pace of the lessons is adjusted to allow for increased practice.

The Spanish lessons prepare the child in his first language for the conceptual content of the English lessons.

The Spanish lessons also help the child to acquire standard alternatives for certain non-standard features of his own dialect of Spanish. The Spanish lessons are an integral part of the package and must be taught by a Spanish-speaking person. If this is not possible and the English lessons are used by themselves, the conceptual dimension will need substantially more reinforcement and progress through the lessons will be considerably slower.

In the Demonstration Packet there is a colored sheet describing the sequence of linguistic patterns and conceptual content. It shows, for example, that the Spanish lessons have the children describing objects by size and using plurals in the first unit whereas these features are not asked for in English until the second unit.

The conceptual content of the language lessons is selected carefully to insure its usefulness to the child preparing for the standard school setting. At the preschool level, this means stressing basic intellectual skills. We chose to stress four main areas: spatial relations, temporal relations, seriation, and classification.

In spatial relations we stress relational prepositions such as "in," "on," "out," etc., and body movements, for example, "My arm is up."

Simple sequential activities are the best example of temporal relations, with the child telling what comes first, next, and last in an activity.

Seriation activities involve the child ordering quantities by number up to 5 at a time, and ordering objects by size. We also have them work with relationships such as fast and slow.

Classification activities receive a great deal of attention, in an attempt to get the child to focus on one attribute of an object at a time, and to see that a single object can belong in different groups depending upon what attribute is of interest at a particular time.

Let me illustrate how these linguistic and conceptual considerations operate by describing several of the lessons in the program. We start with Spanish Circle 1, and the child is urged only to say his own name. At the top of the lesson the exact patterns or linguistic targets that the activity is aimed at are given, along with the conceptual focus and a description of the materials needed. The information in the heading becomes much more useful as the linguistic target features get more complicated and as the teacher begins to deviate from the specific activity. The English translation of the Spanish lessons is provided to allow the monolingual English speaking teacher to be fully aware of the language and conceptual development taking place. The Spanish lessons are never taught in English. The English translation of the Spanish lessons is never used as a basis for an English activity since the linguistic patterns are less controlled.

English Circle 1 is the next activity. Again, there is a clear statement of the linguistic focus, the conceptual focus, and the materials needed. This activity involves choral production of the names of the children in the class. There is much prompting, and the activity encourages natural use of the pattern, "It's Robert," rather than simply, "Robert," or "It is Robert."

English Circle 2 has the children shift from the identification of people to the identification of objects, specifically, a car. They have previously identified objects in Spanish.

Spanish Circles 6 and 7 demonstrate that the Spanish lessons rapidly pull away from the English lessons in terms of complexity. These lessons, for example, have the children classifying objects on the basis of size, involving opposites, whereas English Circle 5, which comes after Spanish Circles 6 and 7, still has the children identifying objects. It does, however, involve "not" statements and has the children making individual rather than choral responses.

Spanish Circle 14 illustrates the attempts to familiarize the children with standard Spanish alternatives to certain non-standard features of their dialect of Spanish, "muéstrame" for "móstrame" in this case. These non-standard features are often the products of the natural development of language, for example, our population tends to use the anglicized "pusha" for "empuja" and the archaic "dende" for "desde."

English Circle 35, which occurs about halfway through the program, demonstrates the progress made in the second language. By this time children are producing questions and statements about identification of objects and questions about quantity and location. This lesson also points up the attention that must be paid to special problems of Spanish speakers. "In" and "on" are particularly troublesome for native Spanish speakers since both of these are represented by the single Spanish word, "en." The "t-s" combination in "what's" and "it's" is difficult since this consonant cluster is absent in Spanish. Both the voiced and voiceless "th" sounds are troublesome, giving rise to pronounciations such as "was dees?" We will never know how many times the question "What's this?" has gone unasked because a child was ashamed of his language and afraid--afraid that someone would listen to <u>how</u> he said something instead of listening to <u>what</u> he said.

English Circle 59 illustrates the control of English that is expected from the child at the end of the eight weeks. The child is producing fairly intricate questions and describing a series of events in order. This lesson also points up the attention given to conceptual goals, in this instance statements involving temporal relations such as, "first," "then," and "last."

The lessons were field tested in Michigan, Ohio, and Colorado during the summer of 1968. Most teachers did as we expected and did not follow the activities exactly as they were written. Primarily, the lessons were useful as a teacher training instrument. Teachers who used the lessons carefully for two or three weeks and then began to use only the sequence of language and conceptual goals seemed to expand their repertoire of language teaching skills and have a much more sophisticated idea of what language skills the children brought to the situation.

The teachers were kind in their evaluations of the lessons and indicated that the language and conceptual focus items were appropriate to the population, that the lessons were workable, and that the children made progress. Most of the teachers who initially resented being handed specific lessons eventually appreciated having something complete, and well planned to react to and revise to meet their needs.

A few teachers never used the lessons. This was generally because they had already incorporated many of the ideas into their teaching. This was rare because the teachers involved seldom had any background in the techniques of foreign language teaching. Some teachers, only a few luckily, did not use or like any part of the package.

Teacher comments are interesting, and teacher training and involvement is essential, but changes in pupil behavior are the ultimate criteria. The mobility of the migrant frustrates adequate evaluation even more than it does instruction. However, in one area of Michigan the migrant population stays for a slightly longer period than is generally the case. This is due to preseason recruiting of the workers and the nature of the crop. In this area we were able to set up something resembling an experimental design although it involved only 26 children. We found that, for these centers, utilization of our lessons led to better command of English structures than did a more traditional "free play" type of preschool. What was also interesting is that one of the experimental groups did not differ significantly from the control group with regard to the number of errors made, but only had a lower incidence of non-responding. Evidently use of the lessons encourages the children to talk more, therefore bringing the teacher more in contact with actual language problems.

The lessons have been revised extensively on the basis of the field trial and will be used this summer in the teacher orientation activities in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. We have also received more than 250 requests for copies from New Mexico and numerous requests from other states and Canada, indicating potential use in those areas.

The lessons plug into similar materials we are producing that are available at the kindergarten and the 1st grade levels. They are also being adapted for use with preschool Cherokee Indian children in Oklahoma.

To summarize, this oral language program for Spanish-speaking four- and five-year-olds occupies approximately 45 minutes per day for eight weeks. It appears to be useful in preparing teachers who have little experience with non-English speaking children. A Spanish-speaking person is essential to the implementation of the lessons since the conceptual content is introduced in Spanish. English patterns are introduced in situations calling for meaningful communication about relevant content. There is little activity involving simple manipulation of patterns. In Michigan, since it is used in the teacher orientation activities, the common program goals probably result in a more or less continuous educational experience for the migrant child. This is especially meaningful in view of the fragmented, inadequate schooling he now receives wherever he goes.